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ABSTRACT

This paper examines school management and decision-making practices in four small rural New Zealand secondary schools. During the late 1980s, national legislation was enacted that established local school governance by elected boards of trustees. A national teachers' union felt that teachers and their unions had been marginalized from policy-making processes. The union advocated a shared decision-making model in which teachers, parents, and central and local educational administrators have equal voices in determining school policy, and decided to sponsor research on related attitudes and practices. Data were obtained through interviews; informal observations; informal discussions; and questionnaires administered to staff, students, boards of trustees, and parents. The study found that in addition to the changing roles of principals, teachers, and teachers' unions, schools face the same issues of technological change and consequent restructuring that affect organizations in the private sector. Most students were not aware of the role of student board representatives and therefore were not aware of participative management practices. Most parents did not see themselves as significant in terms of school management or decision making. In most cases, the board was seen by the community as remote although most parents expressed satisfaction with its work. This paper concludes that participative management practices have not been entirely successful or productive in rural schools, and that more research is needed to verify that this is an appropriate management model for New Zealand schools. Contains 10 references. (LP)

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A FRAMEWORK FOR THE ANALYSIS OF SHARED DECISION MAKING IN RURAL NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS

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A FRAMEWORK FOR THE ANALYSIS OF SHARED DECISION MAKING IN RURAL NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS

Ken Stevens — New Zealand

ABSTRACT

The administration of schools in industrialised nations at local rather than central levels over the last decade has resulted in increased interest in the management of education. Over the last decade there have been many changes that have affected the administration of education in New Zealand, although government remains the central funding agency of the school system. All New Zealand schools are governed by Boards of Trustees consisting of six elected representatives; there is no intermediate agency between them and government. The Ministry of Education has become essentially a policy and financial management agency. In 1991 the New Zealand secondary school teachers union, the Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA), commissioned research involving Victoria University of Wellington and the University of Illinois at Chicago that would indicate directions for the effective management of secondary schools. The project is designed to test a shared decision making model in which teachers, parents and community members all have equal voices in determining school policy. This paper outlines a methodology for shared decision making in rural schools in remote New Zealand communities, using action research methods to describe management structures and decision making processes and reports on the first part of a longitudinal research programme.

This paper outlines research in four small rural New Zealand schools as part of a larger project which includes a variety of urban schools. The project uses action research methods to explore management structures and decision making processes. The research attempts to document school practices from a theoretical base and to outline both successful and unsuccessful developments in the participating schools. The viability of small rural schools in New Zealand has been the subject of a recent review (Macaskill, 1991) and it is timely to consider the appropriateness of their management in changing economic and political circumstances.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The administration of New Zealand schools has changed from a high level of central control to a decentralised model in the last decade. At the same time there has been a considerable amount of central government curriculum change and attempts to measure expected standards of performance. A consequence of this is increased interest in management by school principals, boards of trustees and teacher unions.

While there have been many changes in the administration of education in New Zealand it must be realised that this movement is part of a larger shift in industrialised nations towards direct management to local level away from central state authorities. In New Zealand one of the reasons for this management shift was the public perception of central government failure to provide the type of education that many desired, combined with widespread awareness of the need to address inequalities of school outcomes. Education has long been the subject of public debate in New Zealand and, as in all developed countries, is a major area of public expenditure. Accordingly, schools are of interest to both government and economists in terms accountability for the allocation of money at local level. A major item of school expenditure is personnel costs and in New Zealand there have been attempts to replace collective contracts with local or individual contracts. There has also been government interest in the abolition of automatic salary progression for teachers based on service, in favour of financial advancement based 'on merit'. Furthermore, there is government interest in replacing school formulae based on staffing entitlements in favour of local staffing management through a fixed fund. These moves in the funding of New Zealand schools have to be considered in terms of the larger context of labour market de-centralisation and the public's concern about the performance of schools.

The outcome for New Zealand secondary school teachers has been professional, organisational and industrial changes. In 1994 New Zealand teachers face a public that no longer accepts the concept of a profession which is beyond question. The teacher- community relationship is currently being redefined along with professional - client (ie student) relations.

Many New Zealand teachers are confused as a result of rapid changes in the organisation of education accompanied by challenges to their professional standing and public demands for accountability in what is a major area of public expenditure. In 1994 teachers in New Zealand schools are faced with the necessity of forming collaborative relationships with parents, communities and students. They are also involved in a public discussion about the future direction of the teaching profession as well as their own working conditions.

ORGANISATION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The study is organised by the New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) - the secondary teachers' union, Victoria University of Wellington and, in a consultative capacity, the University of Illinois at Chicago. The PPTA's interest in this research lies in the changed environment in which it has had to operate since 1990. The necessity for this research project became increasingly obvious following the election of a Labour government in 1984 and the legislation that it subsequently implemented: the 1988 State Sector Act, the 1989 Education Act, the 1988 Public Finance Act and the 1991 Employment Contracts Act. Schools remain under the control of central government although there is now local school governance through elected Boards of Trustees (BOT) consisting of six representatives elected by parents, the principal, a student, one member of the school's teaching staff and various co-opted members. There is no longer an intermediate agency between the local Board of Trustees and the Ministry of Education in Wellington. The Ministry of Education now has the primary purpose of providing policy advice to the minister. Another central institution, the Education Review Office (ERO) conducts quality audits on all schools. Schools in New Zealand are globally funded for all of their operations while teachers' salaries remain under central government control.

The legislation that has been enacted in the last decade has been largely concerned with school management, financial accountability and industrial relations rather than with educational ideals. *Tomorrow's Schools* was published before the 1989 Education Act and contained a number of policy statements about the forms of management that government wished to see implemented in schools and which would, it was argued, improve teacher accountability and performance. The 1989 legislation that was subsequently enacted placed teacher unions in a marginal position in the central policy making processes. The PPTA was largely excluded from award negotiations between 1988 and 1991; it reacted by commissioning a research report on the specific personnel proposals contained in *Tomorrow's Schools*. (Munro,1989). This report recommended that the union commission its own research in the face of its exclusion from government policy development. The Munro report noted that a significant obstacle to teacher performance was exclusion from policy decisions which, it was argued, undermined the teaching profession. It was therefore argued by the PPTA and other teacher unions that New Zealand teachers should have a major share in local school decisions alongside BOTs and central government agencies (the Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office).

The PPTA began to advocate a shared decision making model in which teachers, parents, community members and central and local educational administrators have equal voices in determining school policy. Research was needed to obtain information about how parents, students and teachers felt about a variety of issues relating to the management of individual schools.

The focus on shared decision making is important for several reasons. Team work is increasingly favoured in developed societies

RC 020394

in place of central government control. Shared decision making as a basis of school organisation provides students with a useful role model of adults working co-operatively to solve common problems. Furthermore, teachers who are excluded from policy making and who have rules and conditions imposed upon them are not likely to be committed to such a system. This research is about the transition from a model of hierarchical control to a model that emphasises collegiality and consensus.

THE DESIGN OF THE PROJECT

In 1991 Roberta Hill was commissioned to design an action research plan (Hill, 1992). Hill was asked to prepare a report which would:

(i) Identify a need for change by assessing present circumstances;

(ii) Develop a research base and an analytical framework;

(iii) Stipulate responses at school level.

As the research developed it became more ambitious. Rather than being the final word on the commissioned topic, Hill's work was to instead become a template of school decision making practices which would be used to encourage experimentation in a selected group of schools in urban and rural New Zealand. In effect, Hill's report became the basis of a long term action research project.

The PPTA, which commissioned the study, selected Victoria University of Wellington's Faculty of Education to implement much of the research in the schools. University researchers brought with them both research skills and experience and, most importantly, were seen by all parties to be neutral in the action research process.

METHODOLOGY OF THE PROJECT

Action research involves groups of people working together to gather and analyse data. The emphasis on action research is on group decision making. Usually the process involves several cycles which include identifying the problem or the need for change, assessing the current situation, planning,

action and then evaluation. This research approach is sufficiently flexible to accommodate a wide variety of situations and, of particular importance in a long term programme that is located in a wide variety of sites, it allows for changing research personnel. It also accommodates changes in the participating researchers themselves as they learn from the process in which they are engaged.

Action research involves:

> "a much more systematic and deliberate investigation of circumstances and the implementation of initiatives by participants, so that they can formulate explicitly the rationale for certain strategies, communicate their perspective to others, and understand clearly what it is that they should be monitoring through the change process. In this sense action research implies theoretical sophistication which links substantive areas of social or technical explanation with thorough analysis of the process of change"
>
> (URCOT, 1992, p4).

In this project the researchers from the PPTA and Victoria University of Wellington both observe and describe the experiences of the thirteen participating schools (nine urban and four rural) and participate in the process of reflection and the change that follows. The participating schools are assisted financially from funds in the project by being provided with expertise, advice, opportunities for professional development and for school networking.

There are two methodological concepts in this research: Analytical Induction and Triangulation (Capper et al,1993):

> "Analytic induction entails a process of iteration which entails feeding back observations and analysis based on gathered data to the school as tentative observations for future action or further investigation. The process whereby the school considers this feedback leads to an increasingly refined focus on key issues. This in turn leads to progressive refinement of the initial tentative observations. This cyclic process will continue throughout the life of the project, but it is anticipated that many schools will continue to use the techniques for self review after the project has ended and the external researchers have withdrawn"

Taylor et al (1990) have observed that analytic induction is:

> "...a very powerful tool in establishing the validity of conclusions from an inquiry...this process helps counter the notion held by some that inductive procedures... can be dismissed as 'soft', lacking in rigorous methodological development, and of dubious validity. In fact, thesestudies usually have a strongly developed system of triangulation for the testing of the data, as described by Hill (1984)"

Triangulation involves the collection of data from a variety of sources and the identification of possibly valid observations based on the descriptions of phenomena from different sources (Capper et al, 1993). In the present research project the initial sources have been:

(i) Questionnaires administered to samples of staff (25%), students (10%), Boards of Trustees (100%) and parents (10%). (Response rates have varied, partly because of the issue of confidentiality)

(ii) Detailed interviews with small groups from each of the above.

(iii) Detailed interviews with the principal, chairperson of the Board of Trustees and the union branch chairperson in each school.

(iv) Analysis of each school's documentation

(v) nformal observations and conversations in each school

(vi) Information gained during discussions with key people in the school concerning what elements of the school should be focussed on in the research project.

The use of triangulation of sources, methods and points in time adds to the validity of the conclusions that are reached. As Taylor et al, 1990, point out:

> " logical integration of data from different sources and different methods of analysis into a set of single consistent interpretations leads to valid findings."

APPLICATION OF THE METHODOLOGY

Four principles have been adopted for application in all the participating schools (Capper et al, 1990, pp8-9):

(i) The methodology does not attempt to provide a comprehensive and definitive description of a school's decision making processes. Instead it seeks to identify important issues suitable for more detailed attention. There should be continuing dialogue between the researchers and the school.

(ii) Sacrifices have been made in terms of quantitative data gathering in the interests of not placing a heavy burden on the participating schools. Rather, the iterative technique has been used which enables issues to be identified tentatively and for observations to be increasingly refined through the cycles.

(iii) Tentative observations are made on the basis of the data collected. Where data is congruent, suggesting similar perceptions, these are included in reports. Where there is incongruity, suggesting a wide divergence of perceptions, these contradictions are brought to the attention of the school concerned. Where data from any one of the participating schools diverges from the overall pattern, the exceptions are brought to the attention of the school in a report.

(iv) The use of the reports remains under the control of the school concerned. When a report is presented to a school, members of that institution are invited to respond in one of four ways: whether it is valid and therefore worthy of active attention; whether it is valid but not a priority for school

action, whether the school is unsure of its validity and wants further investigation; whether the report is invalid and not relevant and therefore of no further interest.

INITIAL RESULTS

(i) Phase One Reports

The phase one report was published in 1992 (Hill, 1992) and the following section of this paper summarises it. It should be noted that this document stands by itself as a resource for schools appraising their own management structures. The phase one report is, as noted above, a template resource for schools.

The phase one report considered the many changes that have taken place in the New Zealand education system since 1984 as described by teachers, teacher organisations and the literature on educational policy. The paper identified a large number of issues facing the teaching profession and New Zealand education at a time of change. Principals were found to be working longer hours than before the changes began after 1984 but spending less of their time in professional leadership activities. Increasingly, principals were becoming isolated from their teachers and from students as a result of having to spend more time on administrative matters such as school finances.

The role of the teacher unions in schools was seen to be changing. Many differing perceptions of its role emerged because of the fluid situation that teachers found themselves in. Some teachers saw the present project as an attempt by the union to take over the schools while others took the opposite view - that the union was being co-opted by management. Some of the teachers questioned regarded the way that decisions were made in their school as none of the union's business while the majority saw it as central to responsible professionalism.

Many teachers were found to be reconsidering the appropriateness of the management model that was proposed in Tomorrow's Schools and were concerned about its implementation. However, few teachers had a view on what was a more appropriate model of educational management.

Following an outline of the issues facing schools and teachers in particular, the report considered the theoretical foundations of workplace reform (Clark and Meloy, 1990), largely to clarify the appropriateness of the questions that should be asked. It was pointed out that schools in New Zealand face many of the same issues of technological change and consequent restructuring that are having to be considered in the private sector. Just as participative practices are increasingly seen as appropriate in the private sector, so they should be considered in the changed environment of New Zealand schools. It was pointed out that in a major OECD review (OECD, 1990), shared decision making was identified as a fundamental prerequisite for effective school organisation. This involves collaborative planning and collegial experimentation and evaluation. It also means consensus about school norms and goals and leadership that is committed to maintaining this type of development. Finally, the first phase of the research found that student motivation was influenced by the distinctive culture of each school.

(ii) Phase Two — Preliminary Findings

At present the exercise of data gathering has been completed in each of the participating schools and the reports have been delivered to each institution for consideration. There is now a dialogue taking place between each school and the researchers. The findings that follow are of a preliminary nature and relate to issues of partnership between schools and their communities.

As well as interviews with principals, deputy principals, board chairpersons, students and union organisers, a wide range of school documentation was studied, including school newsletters, magazines and other relevant items.

Student Representatives

The 1989 Education Act provided for student representation on school boards. Some students reported that they felt overwhelmed by being the only young person on the school board. In most schools students played a role in management and in some instances an agenda item for receiving a report on student matters was a feature of meetings. In most schools however, students were excluded from discussion relating to personnel and disciplinary matters. Student representatives were usually selected in their last year at school and there was therefore a lack of continuity in this aspect of a school's management structure. However, while the participation of students on boards of trustees worked well in most instances, there was little awareness in the general student body of most schools of what these students actually did, and in many schools, of even who they were. Most students in the schools that are participating in this project are therefore not aware of the management processes that are in place.

Parents' Participation in School Management

One of the fundamentals of the reforms set in place by Tomorrow's Schools is that parents are supposed to know what is best in terms of their children's needs and should therefore be the real managers of education. In reality it has been found to date that most parents are not well informed about what goes on in their neighbourhood school and are not particularly willing to be involved in school management.

Most parents did not see themselves as significant in terms of school management or decision making and stated that they considered it was the teachers' job to determine school policy. Most parents did not see school management as the Board of Trustees' job either. While the majority of parents gave only a low priority to issues of school management and did not wish to be involved in or consulted about it, they stated that they wished to be kept informed about school events and activities. In many instances school newsletters were not found to be an effective means of communication with homes; in some cases it was found that parents could not understand them, largely because of their reading levels. Report evenings for parents have therefore been found to be more effective ways of communicating between school and home.

Parents and Boards of Trustees

Since 1989 Boards of Trustees legally govern New Zealand schools on behalf of parents. In many cases the Board was seen by the community to be remote although most parents expressed satisfaction with the work that they thought they were doing. The New Zealand legislation in 1989 defined the role of the Boards of Trustees as "governance" and that of the Principal as "management" although this distinction has never been clear. In most schools the board and the principal have established good working relations. In terms of making school policy most boards defer to the principal and in some cases boards do not see themselves as appropriate when considering matters relating to the curriculum.

SCHOOL BASED DECISION MAKING IN RURAL SCHOOLS

Participatory management practices are still at an early stage in New Zealand although it is possible to make some tentative observations. The following observations relate to the rural schools in the project (N=4).

There has been initial resistance from some teachers to the introduction of this form of management, particularly from those who have positions of power and influence in the school system. The success of the introduction of participatory management is, in large part, dependent on the performance of the principal and his or her relationship with the board. There has been considerable confusion in the responses of teachers in most of the schools that have been surveyed.

A critical factor in the success of the transition from hierarchical to participatory management is the relationship between what is said will be done and what actually happens (Capper et al, 1993, p18).

A major problem in the introduction of participatory management remains the veto of the principal. The principal has vested in him or her legal authority, whether of not this is exercised. Most

committees in schools in the project went to considerable lengths to ensure that the principal's opinion was congruent with the collective decision that it made.

The implementation of collegial structures requires constant monitoring to ensure that time is not wasted and that duplication does not occur. It is possible for time to be used unproductively through the introduction of too many committees with overlapping functions.

Finally, in no rural school that has been observed so far has the collective management structure been seen to be operating in a way that could be described as productive and harmonious. Although there is support for the introduction of this type of school management in the research literature and in the broader context of the private sector, it may not necessarily be an appropriate management model for all New Zealand schools. This should be clarified as the research progresses.

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